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AUTHOR Berry, Kathryn; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In 1980, the environment of Eastfield College was characterized by declining enrollments, reduced funding, staff unrest, and low morale. In response to a collegewide need, Eastfield's Quality of Life project, originally designed to increase community participation, was transformed to focus on participatory organizational renewal. The renewal project was based on responsiveness to immediate needs and interests, spontaneous feedback to ideas, active listening, voluntary participation, and honesty. The renewal process involved small group discussions, brainstorming sessions, risk taking, the organization and follow-up of ideas, the establishment of information networks and support systems, management involvement, and small group activity planning. The process involved participants in creative problem solving and in finding new directions for accomplishing the work to be done. A participatory renewal process is most rewarding and effective when an organization recognizes change as a constant and when managers are aware of the process and structure of change; but however well the models for renewal may be executed, there will be some resistance to change. To reduce this resistance, several factors should be considered, such as achieving agreement on basic problems; ensuring feedback, clarification, and revision; and providing a supportive and accepting environment. (A 50-item questionnaire, which may be used to stimulate discussion, identify potential changes, and assess the organizational climate, is included.) (HB)

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RETHINK, RETOOL, RENEW:

A TRANSITIONAL MODEL FOR INSTITUTIONS

This article is an adaptation of a program presented at the World Future Society Conference, July 1982, Washington, D.C. The authors are from the Dallas County Community College District, Dallas, Texas (Kathryn Berry, Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Educational Affairs; Sylvia Gray, Counselor and Director of Cooperative Education/Placement at El Centro College; Eileen Lynch, Government Instructor and Instructional Television Coordinator, Brookhaven College; and Eleanor Ott, President, Eastfield College).

Institutions are collections of people, and as such, experience similar development. Literature, and more importantly, personal experience tell us that development occurs in stages and is often an uneven and frustrating process. The individuals relating their experiences through this article found themselves in a situation as a result of a particularly painful developmental stage for an institution.

The authors are all members of the Dallas County Community College District. At the time being reported, two were functioning as faculty and two were administrators at Eastfield College, one of the seven colleges in the District. While the Dallas system is sixteen years old, Eastfield was not opened until 1970. The college enrolls approximately 8,000 credit students each semester and another 6,000 non-credit. Eastfield celebrated its tenth birthday by having a miserable year.

As a means of understanding the environment in 1980, the President's description of that milieu is helpful:

We had had a slight downturn in enrollment, which meant reduced funding, while at the same time we were battling inflation and the demands of a ten-year old facility and equally-aged equipment.

A new District-wide faculty evaluation system generated another complication. Supervisors changed from a process requiring a one-page narrative of strengths and weaknesses to a ten-page document aimed at discriminating between levels of performance on numerous individual characteristics.

These combined factors worked to produce a chaotic year of general staff unrest and exceptionally poor morale. Every facet of the college suffered, including students. This was more than an awareness that the work climate was not ideal. The environment had deteriorated to the place that "morale" was frequently the topic of conversation across campus. People talked about faculty having moved into a new competitive posture as opposed to one of collegiality. "Polarization" was a word frequently used. Popular expressions were, "We need to get back on the track," and, "Something has to be done."

People were relieved when graduation was behind them. While I was grateful the spring semester was over, I experienced a certain amount of desperation about the future. True, summer would help, but I was convinced that unless a renewal project was initiated, we'd be even worse off at the end of the next year.

Concurrent to these unhappy events, the Student Development staff was designing a project called "Quality of Life" for the 1981-82 year. In that project, the explicit goal was not organizational renewal. The staff ran headlong into an intense renewal process, however, on the way to the primary goal, which was to increase community participation in the college.

The need of the faculty and staff for renewal was so intense that it overpowered all the carefully, predetermined goals. It would have been folly and sheer stupidity to have insisted on sticking to the original plan once the most pressing needs of the organization became evident.

Thus developed what may be an idiosyncratic definition of renewal, though the authors believe it has universal application for typical American organizations. A successful renewal project includes several specific traits:

1. Immediacy--responding to immediate needs and interests even though they are not on the published agenda.

2. Spontaneity--rewarding with attention the impulsive remark, the absurd idea, the genuine doubt, the creative flash.

3. Listening--more than anything else, actively listening to what people want and need to say.

4. Voluntary participation--because it becomes intrinsically rewarding for the individual as needs for recognition and affiliation are satisfied.

5. Honesty--valuing the unique qualities of each person and using conflicts between individuals or groups as a springboard for creative problem solving.

This is the baseline, or the ethic, for organizational renewal. It is more of an affective than a cognitive process, and the means are critical determinants of the ends.

Organizations, like kids, are people too. They have a heart and a soul, a common sense of history and purpose, and like a person, their health is dependent on their internal integrity. (One way to measure health in an organization is to assess the degree to which relationships are coherent and fluid, or stated in the negative, the degree to which relationships are rigid and compartmentalized.)

American organizations are dissipative structures. The authors believe, within this concept of renewal, in caring for the dissipative parts (that is, one's colleagues), and in cooperatively and very consciously shaping the health and future of the organization by so doing.

The by-products of enacting this belief system at Eastfield College included a significant turnaround in employee morale, the formation of voluntary faculty work groups to improve the quality of instruction, and the

formation of spontaneous social groups that do not distinguish between one's rank as faculty, administrator, or secretary as a basis for belonging. In other words, genuine renewal increases productivity for an organization.

When initiating renewal for institutions, the process will be successful only if a truly participative process, based on trust, is emphasized. Akio Morito, chief executive officer of Sony, has said that management and workers must trust each other as humans because harmony is the most important element of an organization. An understanding that all institutional members are in the same boat is essential--they share the same fate and together they can create the future.

The Quality of Life model for renewal followed this process:

1. An opportunity was provided for a small group of people, representative of all categories of employees, to interact with an outside consultant who facilitated their focusing on the problems and potentials of the institution. (The advantage of using an outside consultant at this stage, and throughout the process, is that it mediates the typical tunnel vision of the insiders. The outsider can be more objective and more provocative due to his lack of dependence on the institution.)

2. The consultant and this initial group brainstormed ideas on how best to involve all employees in a "stimulation-for-action" event to take hold of the future.

3. Small groups of all employees were formed using the members of the initial group as facilitators to brainstorm the following question (which had been designed by the initial group): "In some ways the community college reflects the community, and in others it serves as an agent for change. In

what ways can Eastfield, and you as an individual, influence positive and creative change for the future, beginning now?"

4. Risk-taking was encouraged throughout the process by providing security and recognition for the risk-takers.

5. The ideas generated from the brainstorming sessions, some 600, were organized under ten general interest areas. Then all employees were invited to follow-up on an area of interest to them, as individuals on a volunteer basis. All did not follow-up; a small group began the action, and involvement spread to others.

6. Within each general interest area, the volunteers identified specific activities they wished to accomplish during the year.

7. Leaders were not identified for these sub-groups; they most often emerged from the membership. When a leader did not emerge, a request was made for a volunteer to network information within the sub-group and between this group and other groups.

8. Individuals made commitments to use the human resources in their groups to the fullest; people were encouraged to decide what they could do best. (This is another part of the process where an outside consultant can push for commitment without unduly threatening employees, whereas an insider might more easily establish a backlash.)

9. Information networks and support systems were established for individuals to share in creating and working.

10. Small group social activities were planned, spontaneous fun was encouraged, and celebrations were planned along the road to renewal.

11. Top management was involved as a participant; natural leaders were encouraged to emerge. The project was not directed by the appointed leadership of the institution. Instead, the President trusted the process and provided information and dialogue when requested.

When this process was followed, people became involved in creative problem solving and in finding new directions for accomplishing the work to be done. Information networks and support groups aided in management of human resources and confrontation of issues. With this participatory renewal process, people felt they had some control over their lives and their college. Individuals were empowered to work to their fullest potential in a community of trusting members. They were able to care and share and work together in controlling and creating their future.

A participatory renewal process is most rewarding when an organization recognizes that change is a constant factor. Organizations, managers, administrators, employees, shareholders, customers, and students are all continually experiencing change and transition. It is therefore essential that managers and administrators be aware of the structure and process of change. Successful managers and administrators view themselves as catalysts and promoters of the renewal process, rather than as merely reactors or blocks to it.

There are many definitions of change, and there are many models of change. What models are used by a specific organization depend on the kind of change, the setting, the time factor, and the manager's view of change. Planned models are based on the assumptions that change can be rational, predictable, and controllable. Other models are based on a more complex, political model of change, with political infighting and structural and behavioral barriers

as key elements. Clearly, both careful planning and sensitivity are necessary where renewal is desired.

However orderly and skillfully executed the models for renewal may be, there will be some resistance to most changes. Any changes one would like to see made are not necessarily good for everyone, so resistance to change is not always irrational.

To decrease participants' resistance to change, several factors need to be considered:

1. Participants agree on the basic problems and feel their importance.
2. Participants feel their autonomy and security are not threatened.
3. The program of renewal offers the kind of new experience which interests and stimulates participants.
4. The renewal has support from all levels of the organization, including top officials.
5. The change is designed and adopted by consensual group decision.
6. Change managers are able to empathize with opponents, to recognize valid objections, and to relieve unnecessary fears and correct misunderstandings.
7. Provision is made to insure feedback, clarification, and revision.
8. Participants experience acceptance, support, trust, and confidence in their relationships with one another.

The following questionnaire was developed as a result of experiencing the Quality of Life project. It may be used to stimulate discussion, identify potential changes to be made, or assess organizational climate.

BARRIERS TO RENEWAL

Instructions: Circle the number on the continuum that most closely relates to each aspect of your organization.

	<u>Structural</u>								
	<u>Traditional</u>								<u>Transitional</u>
1. Closed doors - by appointment only	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Open doors, cracked door, drop-in
2. Size and decor of work space related to title	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Size and decor of work space related to job requirements & personal taste
3. Work activities confined to job description	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Work activities flexible to accommodate talents & interests of incumbent
4. Rigid timeframes for work hours & holidays	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Timeframes adjusted to special needs of job and/or employee
5. Explicit and implicit dress codes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Acceptance of personal taste
6. Use of titles on doors, nameplates, and in conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Pictures & nicknames in directory; commitment to use first names on a daily basis
7. Planned social events	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Spontaneous social events
8. Non-existent or token use of committees for decision making	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Participatory management
9. Majority of attention given to "professional employees"	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Expectation that all employees will receive attentive behavior
10. Emphasis on task completion only	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Emphasis on personal needs as well
11. No child care center or provision for leave to be with sick children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Child care provided and/or provision made for leave to be with sick children

BARRIERS TO RENEWAL

Communications

<u>Traditional</u>										<u>Transitional</u>
12. Dependence upon paper (letters/memos)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Personal contact (face-to-face/phone/handwritten notes)
13. Multi-level sign-off on forms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Forms signed by originator plus one
14. Numerous forms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Few forms
15. Unpublished phone numbers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Published phone numbers
16. Committee membership based upon job description or title only	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Committee membership also based upon knowledge and interest
17. Isolated decision making	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Collective decision making
18. Overuse of trade jargon	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Reduce or explain jargon
19. Treat information as classified	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Open information systems
20. Need to reinvent the wheel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Encourage sharing & networking
21. Scapegoating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Accepting personal responsibility
22. "I can't do it because they won't let me"	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Reality testing
23. Premature closure in interest of efficiency	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Allowing for reasonable input, data, discussion, and debate
24. Intolerance of ambiguity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Tolerance of ambiguity
25. Stereotyping, labeling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Acceptance & appreciation of individual differences
26. Hidden agendas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Up front about personal goals
27. React only to rational	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Acknowledge value of intuitive and subjective input

BARRIERS TO RENEWAL

		<u>Behaviors</u>									
<u>Traditional</u>										<u>Transitional</u>	
28.	Destructive criticism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Constructive suggestions	
29.	Avoidance of confrontation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Use of confronting and negotiating behaviors	
30.	Tunnel vision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Holistic vision	
31.	Closed meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Invite visitors from other work groups to meetings	
32.	Subdued, impersonal behaviors expected of employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Acceptance of humor, fear, and spontaneous behaviors	
33.	Peer jealousy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Peer recognition and encouragement	
34.	Intimidation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Encouragement & support; positive stroking	
35.	Aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Assertive	
36.	Apathetic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Involved, committed	
37.	Closed mind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Active listening	
38.	Conformity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Creativity	

BARRIERS TO RENEWAL

Values

<u>Traditional</u>										<u>Transitional</u>
39. Materialism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Human welfare
40. Monetary reward (extrinsic)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Personal satisfaction (intrinsic)
41. Concern for product only	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Include concern for producers and consumers
42. Waste of resources (short gain)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Environmental concern (long gain)
43. Planned obsolescence of products and people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Recycling of products and retraining of people
44. Quantitative standards	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Qualitative standards
45. Fear of risk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Risk taking
46. Hierarchical control only	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Opportunities for situational leadership
47. Individuals perceive themselves as powerless	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Individuals perceive themselves as having influence
48. Feelings of separateness or isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Feelings of belonging
49. Win-lose environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Win-win environment
50. Behavior prescribed by role	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Freedom to respond as human beings
51. Low trust/high anxiety	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		High trust/low anxiety

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Data collected through use of an instrument such as this provide a profile of the values of the organization. Interpretation of the responses will assist in providing insight into the current developmental position of the organization. Differences between participants' perceptions regarding organizational values as they exist, compared to values the participants feel are desirable, provide the foundation for designing activities and programs to meet the needs of the organization as identified by its members.

Accomplishing organizational renewal is neither an easy nor an impossible task. When successful, the payoff is big for everyone. If not attempted, one can assume the mindless status quo could continue ad infinitum, interrupted only by externally-imposed stimulants. The human resources of any organization are such that this second possibility represents a tragic waste of personal talent and service to the larger social body. The risks and effort required to accomplish a successful renewal project are a miniscule investment to make in building better futures for American organizations.

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